

New Organization Formed to Increase Oral Health Status in Kansas—*Organization Hopes to Raise Awareness of the Growing Barriers to Good Oral Health*

Topeka, KS – December 5, 2003 – A coalition of more than 130 organizations is coming together to address oral health issues in the state of Kansas. This coalition, overseen by a new organization called Oral Health Kansas, Inc., is working to overcome barriers to good oral health care through advocacy, public awareness and education.

Oral Health Kansas recently held its first Board of Directors meeting. The following individuals were elected to serve on the Board: Graham Bailey, Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Kansas, Topeka; Mary Baskett, Kansas Head Start Association, Shawnee; Dr. Dennis Cooley, Kansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Topeka; Barry Daneman, UMKC School of Dentistry, Kansas City, Missouri; Judy Eyerly, Kansas Association for the Medically Underserved, Topeka; Judy Johnston, University of Kansas School of Medicine, Wichita; Ann Koci, Social and Rehabilitation Services, Topeka; Nialson Lee, Social and Rehabilitation Services, Topeka; Dawn McGlasson, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Topeka; Kim Moore, United Methodist Health Ministry Fund, Hutchinson; Kevin Robertson, Kansas Dental Association, Topeka; Deborah Stern, Kansas Hospital Association, Topeka; Sharon Tidwell, Jones Foundation, Emporia and Lisa Ward, Delta Dental of Kansas, Wichita.

Teresa Schwab, Lawrence, the organization's new Executive Director, said, "The benefits of good oral health go well beyond healthy, attractive teeth and gums. In fact, sensible personal oral health habits and regular professional care are vital to maintaining good *overall* health."

Unfortunately, several factors prevent many Kansans from having access to dental care and other decay preventing measures. There is a severe shortage of dentists in our state, especially dentists who practice in the most rural regions of the state. Those individuals who are lucky enough to find a local provider, often find cost to be a significant barrier to getting treatment. Many dentists do not accept Medicaid or HealthWave, making it difficult for children from low-income families to get the care they need.

--more--

New Organization Formed to Increase Oral Health Status in Kansas (page 2)

"Kansas lacks enough dental care providers today and has too few providers in training to handle the demands of tomorrow. This situation is reaching critical proportions, and will only worsen as many of the state's older providers reach retirement age," said Mary Baskett, President of Oral Health Kansas.

In addition to issues related to work force and access to care, Oral Health Kansas will address issues regarding prevention, oral health status, and oral health leadership.

Special attention will be given to vulnerable populations, including children, elderly, low income, individuals with disabilities and pregnant women.

Oral Health Kansas will be supported by donors, membership fees and revenues from activities. The Kansas Health Foundation, The Sunflower Foundation: Health Care for Kansans and United Methodist Health Ministry Fund are providing a total of \$230,000 for support during a three-year start-up period.

###

***Oral Health Kansas, Inc.** is a newly established coalition committed to improving the oral health status of all Kansas citizens. With support from major contributors, the coalition's advocacy, public education and awareness efforts will focus on prevention, access to oral health care, oral health leadership, oral health status and developing a work force. In addition to organizing constituents who support this effort, the coalition will organize marketing and advocacy/public policy activities to positively change the current status of oral health in Kansas.*

***The Kansas Health Foundation**, Wichita, Kansas, is a philanthropic organization whose mission is to improve the health of all Kansans.*

***The Sunflower Foundation: Health Care for Kansans** is a Topeka-based philanthropic organization with the mission to serve as a catalyst for improving the health of Kansans.*

***United Methodist Health Ministry Fund**, Hutchinson, Kansas, with the mission: Healthy Kansans through cooperative and strategic philanthropy guided by Christian principles.*

For Further Information:

Teresa Schwab, LMSW

Executive Director

Oral Health Kansas, Inc.

Phone: (785) 235-6039

Fax: (785) 233-5564

E-mail: oralhealthks@carrollsworld.com